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FLUENCY, ACCURACY, AND GENERAL EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION

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Prevalent practice in a large majority of English classrooms endeavors to teach expression by instruction, first in language mechanics, second in fluency of writing, third in general excellence of composition. Is this the right order? If not, why? What, if anything, should be substituted?

In reply to these queries three schools of thought may be distinguished. The first, which may be called the "accuracy" school, is promulgating the movement for what is known as "minimum essentials." The proposal is that for each grade, beginning with the fourth and extending if necessary through the tenth, there shall be designated a certain minimal list of language details which are to be mastered. Thomas goes so far as to advise that in these minimal details every pupil in a class must be made letter perfect before the group is allowed to proceed.¹ There are to be minima of spelling, of idiom, of grammar, of punctuation; there is to be abundant drill in each grade. The hope is that this regimented drill may eradicate many of the pestiferous errors which persist in the language habits of many pupils from kindergarten to college, errors which are the despair of business men, whose condemnation of the schools has been unsparing. Klapper thinks that the habitual errors which the elementary school needs to eliminate number about thirty-six all told, and that, these eradicated, 75 per cent of high school inaccuracies would disappear.²

In response, then, to the commendable desire that written work of pupils be freed from gross irregularities, there is today in its incipency a movement to standardize drill grade by grade in the mechanics of written expression. Errors are believed to be subject

¹ *Teaching of English in Secondary Schools*, p. 86.

² *The Teaching of English*, p. 36.

to the laws of habit rather than to the laws of chance. With this in mind, Johnson asserts that "our general abstract instruction in English composition must be accompanied by strenuous applications of concrete, definite drill, not haphazard practice."¹

Alongside of these champions of standardized drill there is a somewhat opposing school of thought. The National Committee on Reorganization of English, in their platform, "The Aims of the English Course," set forth five abilities which are to be cultivated in writing. These concern very largely such matters as clear thinking, analysis, fluent and effective expression. Then in a "Note" the committee adds the aim of formal correctness in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and idiom.² The committee has thus subordinated mechanics by design. At least this inference is borne out by direct statements which appear later in the report.

The Committee recognizes, moreover, the value of systematized knowledge in the case of grammar, spelling, rhetoric, literary forms . . . and the like. But it believes that this knowledge is subsidiary; that it can actually be gained only through and in connection with genuine constructive activities; and that it should not, therefore, be made the chief basis for the organization of the course or for the standards of attainment to be set up from semester to semester.³

The first step toward efficiency in the use of language is the cultivation of earnestness and sincerity; the second is the development of accuracy and correctness; the third is the arousing of individuality and artistic consciousness.⁴

. . . in the composition course, content should appeal to the pupil as first in importance; organization second; details of punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, choice of words (matters of careful scrutiny) third.⁵

On the basis of these statements we are by no means justified in classing the committee with those who temperamentally rebel against standardization in language drill. They do, however, distinctly subordinate accuracy as a secondary aim, making ease, fluency, and contributiveness the primary aim. Thus these national leaders apparently take a position half-way between those who, in response to the demands of the commercial world, are

¹ "Persistency of Error in Composition," *School Review*, XXV, 579.

² "Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools," *Department of Interior, Bulletin No. 2*, 1917, p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

inclined to overstress standardization and those who, inclined to think that accuracy can best be acquired incidentally, overstress constructive abilities. For want of a better name we may designate the National Committee as belonging to the "sincerity" school.

A third school, not of course sharply distinguished from the other two, may be conveniently called the "social motives" school; it is most adequately represented by S. A. Leonard.¹ These teachers believe that the subject-matter of a composition course must constantly keep children in such relation to thought content on the one side and to audience motive on the other that they may have for expression in school activities motives which are comparable to those in the writing of editorials, the preparation of sermons, and the like. This school believes that both fluency and accuracy in expression must be expected to come largely as by-products of social situations in which the impulse to write effectively is pushed to the fore. They believe that accuracy can best be drilled into a pupil when there is occasion for painstaking effort for correctness, motivated by an earnest desire to be the effective servant of an idea. General excellence in message, and in message-bearing, is, according to these, of supreme importance in school-composition projects.

It should be said at this point that the designation of individuals as belonging to the "accuracy," the "sincerity," or the "social motives" school is not strictly accurate. All of the men mentioned and others like them would insist that their program includes all three of the aspects which we have here for convenience called separate schools. It is true that differences among progressive English teachers consist largely in matters of order and of emphasis in instruction. It might then be wiser to speak of the three schools as urging three somewhat different lines of approach to the problem of making our young people proficient in the use of their mother-tongue.

Now it is quite obvious that makers of English composition programs need something better than loose conjecture and unsupported assertion concerning the fundamental relations between correctness, fluency, and general excellence in the expressional activities

¹ *English Composition as a Social Problem*. Houghton Mifflin Co.

of young people. Such information must come from observation and analysis of the written exercises of pupils. The present study was undertaken with the purpose of securing a body of data which would throw light upon the following questions:

1. What relation exists between fluency of expression and mechanical accuracy in the composition work of high-school Freshmen?
2. What relation exists between fluency and general excellence apart from mechanical accuracy?
3. What relation exists between mechanical accuracy and general excellence?¹

R. I. Johnson examined 396 themes aggregating 50,371 words, written by high-school Freshmen of Kansas City, Missouri. One hundred thirty-two pupils wrote three themes each, a narrative, a description, and an explanation, being allowed for each exercise exactly fifteen minutes to write on their choice of three topics.² The present study includes 59,516 words, the themes of 322 Freshmen in four high schools, Bloomington, Winnetka (New Trier High), and the University of Chicago High, of Illinois, and Vinton, Iowa.³ Only one of Johnson's three sets of exercises, the narrative, was written by pupils concerned in this investigation.⁴ For his narratives Johnson gave the following instructions: "Tell about any incident suggested by (1) 'Missing the Train'; (2) 'A Day's Journey'; or (3) 'A Lucky Mistake.'" The present study also gave to the pupils their choice of three topics: (1) "An Incident of My Summer Vacation"; (2) "An Accident"; and (3) "An Enjoyable Recitation Hour." One innovation differing from the conditions of the earlier study was attempted. Pupils were given five minutes to select their topics and to prepare for writing, their writing time proper being limited to fifteen minutes. This preliminary period

¹ The term "general excellence" as applied to narratives of high-school Freshmen is defined on p. 96 below.

² *School Review*, XXV, 555-80.

³ The writer is indebted to Misses Florence Barnes, Eleanor Wilson, Zelma Clark, Katherine MacMahon, and to Mr. Starr Lasher, teachers in the schools named, and to members of the University of Chicago class, English 7, "The Teaching of Composition in Secondary Schools," for aid in accumulating and examining data.

⁴ See editorial note on p. 124 of this issue for an invitation to other teachers to carry out similar studies, the *School Review* offering to be a clearing-house of their findings, so far as space will permit.

may account for the greater theme length of the present investigation, 183 words for the four high schools as compared with 127 words (150 words for narratives) of Kansas City pupils. (See Table II, p. 93). The first topic was chosen by 189 pupils, the second by 123, and the third by 10. Almost without exception they elected to write narratives of their own personal experience; imaginary incidents were few in number.

THE CATEGORY OF ERROR

To facilitate comparison with Johnson's study this investigation made use of his categories of error.

I. MISTAKES IN THE CASE OF PRONOUNS:

1. Subject or object of verb in wrong case. *She saw my brother and I.*
2. Predicate nominative in wrong case. *I do not know whom he is.*
3. Object of preposition in wrong case. *They called to my friend and I.*
4. Use of objective for possessive with gerund. *It was all the result of that cat crossing my path.*

II. OTHER MISUSES OF PRONOUNS:

5. Disagreement of pronoun and antecedent. *A person can find what they look for.*
6. "You" used indefinitely. *When you start to high school you feel important.*
7. Miscellaneous misuses of the pronoun. *A lady which . . . etc.*

III. MISTAKES IN THE USE OF VERBS:

8. Disagreement of verb and subject. *On the bank was some waterlilies.*
9. Change of tense in main clause.
10. Wrong past tense or past participle. *We had drank.*
11. Wrong verbs used. *I will lay down.*
12. Mistakes in mood. *He acted as though he was the king's son.*

IV. MISTAKES IN THE USE OF ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS:

13. Use of adjective for adverb. *He spoke respectful.*
14. Use of "most" for "almost." *I go most every time.*
15. "Only" misplaced in the sentence. *I only had one lesson to study.*
16. The use of the double negative. *There wasn't hardly room for me.*
17. Miscellaneous misuses of adjectives and adverbs. *It was a very healthy food.*

V. MISTAKES IN THE USE OF PREPOSITIONS AND CONJUNCTIONS:

18. Use of wrong or superfluous preposition. *He got off the car.*
19. Use of wrong conjunction. *The reason was because . . . etc.*
20. Misuse of "like." *It looks like he wasn't coming.*

- VI. UNGRAMMATICAL SENTENCE STRUCTURE:
 - 21. Incomplete sentence.
 - 22. Failure to make new sentence for new thought.
 - 23. Miscellaneous mistakes in sentence structure.
- VII. FAILURE TO EXPRESS CLEAR MEANING:
 - 24. Ambiguity due to indefinite pronominal reference. *He had to eat olives with the Smith girls although he didn't like them.*
 - 25. Awkward, "wordy," or complicated phrasing.
 - 26. Other cases of failure to express clear meaning. *Her mother cooked a dozen eggs and twice as much bacon.*
- VIII. MISTAKES IN PUNCTUATION
 - 27. No period.
 - 28. Members of series not separated.
 - 29. Independent clauses of compound sentences not separated.
 - 30. No punctuation after introductory expression. *Well how are you?*
 - 31. Name of city and state written without punctuation. *Kansas City Missouri.*
 - 32. Miscellaneous mistakes in punctuation.
- IX. MISTAKES IN THE USE OF THE APOSTROPHE:
 - 33. Failure to distinguish between "it's" (it is) and "its" (possessive). *The bird will not do it's best singing if its a cloudy day.*
 - 34. Wrong form of possessive nouns. *There was a sale of ladie's dresses.*
 - 35. "O'clock" written without an apostrophe.
 - 36. Miscellaneous misuses of the apostrophe. *I dont know.*
- X. MISTAKES IN CAPITALIZATION:
 - 37. Failure to use capital letter.
 - 38. Improper use of capital letter.
- XI. CARELESS OMISSION OR REPETITION:
 - 39. Omission of word or phrase.
 - 40. Omission of letter or syllable.
 - 41. Repetition of syllables, words, or phrases.
- XII. MISTAKES IN SPELLING:
 - 42. Compound words incorrectly written.
 - 43. Misspelling of "to," "two," and "too."
 - 44. Misspelling of "their" and "there."
 - 45. Other misspelled words.
- XIII. 46. MISUSE OF QUOTATION MARKS.
- XIV. 47. MISCELLANEOUS ERRORS. *Doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.*

Table I shows a distinct superiority in the mechanics of writing in favor of Kansas City. Of the Kansas City pupils, 396 themes totaling 50,371 words contained 2,160 errors, an average of one

TABLE I
CLASSIFICATION OF ERRORS

	Kansas City	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals Four Schools
Themes	396	70	124	72	56	322
Words	50,371	12,545	22,807	14,736	9,428	59,516
I {	1....	3	5	2	5	
	2....	0	0	0	2	
	3....	1	2	1	0	
	4....	1	1	3	0	
	Total	11	8	6	7	
II {	5....	7	13	8	4	
	6....	2	7	4	0	
	7....	13	27	9	7	
	Total	102	47	21	11	
						101
III {	8....	2	9	8	6	
	9....	2	22	12	6	
	10....	1	10	19	7	
	11....	1	2	13	2	
	12....	1	2	5	2	
	Total	93	45	57	23	132
IV {	13....	0	4	9	5	
	14....	2	0	0	2	
	15....	0	5	0	0	
	16....	0	1	0	2	
	17....	7	16	4	7	
	Total	52	26	13	16	64
V {	18....	9	24	12	8	
	19....	7	7	3	6	
	20....	1	1	6	0	
	Total	50	32	21	14	
						84
VI {	21....	4	10	9	2	
	22....	62	73	121	24	
	23....	13	31	20	9	
	Total	220	114	150	35	
						378
VII {	24....	9	9	19	23	
	25....	11	43	39	15	
	26....	1	30	10	5	
	Total	46	82	68	43	
						214

TABLE I—Continued

	Kansas City	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals Four Schools
Themes.....	396	70	124	72	56	322
Words.....	50,371	12,545	22,807	14,736	9,428	59,516
VIII	27....	21	25	12	8	
	28....	15	27	10	4	
	29....	56	125	136	48	
	30....	26	42	21	9	
	31....	2	9	5	2	
	32....	133	273	179	95	
Total	232	253	501	363	166	1,283
IX	33....	1	2	1	0	
	34....	4	3	1	0	
	35....	9	2	17	1	
	36....	20	14	16	3	
Total	150	34	21	35	4	94
X	37....	28	38	23	31	
	38....	14	11	18	17	
Total	196	42	49	41	48	180
XI	39....	14	44	17	13	
	40....	27	29	24	13	
	41....	19	30	28	25	
Total	223	60	103	69	51	283
XII	42....	10	17	7	10	
	43....	2	5	1	0	
	44....	0	5	1	4	
	45....	112	149	135	111	
Total	675	124	176	144	125	569
XIII	46....	13	11	9	5	
Total	25	13	11	9	5	38
XIV	47....	25	71	64	43	
	Total	85	25	71	43		203
Total.....	2,160	711	1,286	1,061	591	3,649

error for every 23.3 words; 5.4 errors per theme. Of the other four schools, 322 themes aggregating 59,516 words contained 3,649 errors, an average of one error for every 16.3 words; 11.3 errors for each theme. The Kansas City themes are approximately one-

third freer from mistakes. The smaller number of errors per theme of Kansas City pupils is partly accounted for by the greater theme length of the papers in this study, 183 as compared with 127 words.¹ Averaging the totals for all schools involved, we find that these high-school Freshmen, writing 718 themes, 109,887 words, average one error in the mechanics of writing for every 18.8 words they write.

TABLE II
THE RATIO OF ERRORS

	Kansas City	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton
Themes.....	396	70	124	72	56
Words.....	50,371	12,545	22,807	14,736	9,428
Theme length.....	127	179	183	204	168
Total errors.....	2,160	711	1,286	1,061	591
Errors per pupil...	5.4	10.1	10.3	14.7	10.5
Errors per words...	1:23.3	1:17.6	1:17.7	1:13.8	1:15.9

Table III indicates that the Kansas City pupils are relatively bad spellers; nearly one-third of their total errors are in category XII. Moreover, spelling for them totals more than two and one-half times as many inaccuracies as punctuation, VIII. On the

TABLE III
RANK OF ERRORS ACCORDING TO FREQUENCY

	Kansas City		New Trier		University High		Bloomington		Vinton	
I.....	11	14	5	14	8	14	6	14	7	12
II.....	102	7	22	8	47	8	21	10	11	11
III.....	93	8	7	13	45	9	57	7	23	8
IV.....	52	10	9	12	26	11	13	12	16	9
V.....	50	11	17	10	32	10	21	10	14	10
VI.....	220	4	79	3	114	3	150	2	35	7
VII.....	46	12	21	9	82	5	68	5	43	5
VIII.....	232	2	253	1	501	1	363	1	166	1
IX.....	150	6	34	6	21	12	35	9	4	14
X.....	196	5	42	5	49	7	41	8	48	4
XI.....	223	3	60	4	103	4	69	4	51	3
XII.....	675	1	124	2	176	2	144	3	125	2
XIII.....	25	13	13	11	11	13	9	13	5	13
XIV.....	85	9	25	7	71	6	64	6	43	5

¹ This difference in theme length may be due to the fact that the Kansas City figures include a narrative, a description, and an exposition from each of 132 pupils, while the 322 pupils of the four other schools wrote narratives exclusively. The Kansas City narratives averaged 150 words, descriptions 121, expositions 109.

contrary, the other four schools are relatively poor in punctuation, New Trier with 70 themes, University High 124, and Bloomington 72, all having more punctuation mistakes than Kansas City with 396 themes. Indeed, the two outstanding figures in the entire table are category XII, spelling, for Kansas City and category VIII, punctuation, for University High. Of the errors made by the latter school nearly one-half are mistakes in punctuation. Bloomington scores the largest percentage of ungrammatical sentence structure, VI, but is exceptionally good in spelling. Vinton children seem to be superior in grammatical sentence structure. University High and Bloomington, with relatively few errors in category IX, seem to command the correct use of the apostrophe better than the others.

RELATION BETWEEN FLUENCY AND ACCURACY

An examination of Table II shows an apparent contradiction to the statement that pupils who write most fluently have the smallest proportion of errors. Kansas City pupils, who wrote the shortest themes, 127 words, have the fewest errors, 5.4 per pupil, one error for every 23.3 words; while Bloomington children, who wrote most fluently, 204 words per pupil, committed 14.7 errors per pupil, one error for every 13.8 words. The other three schools, whose average fluency was approximately midway between Kansas City and Bloomington, show an average error of 10.4, also midway between the two extremes. In short, the comparison by schools appears to indicate that increased fluency increases the liability to error.

However, it is more equitable to compare pupils in homogeneous groups. Hence in Table IV a comparison is made of pupils within their own groups. From the 70 New Trier themes, to explain, there were selected the 10 longest, averaging 244 words and 12.4 errors per theme; the 10 shortest, averaging 118 words and 10.6 errors per theme; and the 10 which most closely approximated the average theme length for the entire school. These 10 averaged 181 words, with 9.2 errors per pupil. For each of these three groups, the longest, the shortest, and those nearest the average length, the ratio of errors to the number of words written was computed. So also for the other three schools.

In each of the schools except Vinton the 10 pupils who handed in the shortest themes have also the largest ratio of errors to number of words written. Again omitting Vinton, the shortest themes have twice the proportion of errors found in the themes of average length. The longest themes, while freer from error than the shortest, are somewhat inferior to those of average length. The highest ratio of error is reached by the 10 University High pupils whose themes were the shortest for their group, 1 error to 7.1 words; the smallest ratio is reached by the 10 children of the same school whose

TABLE IV
RATIO OF ERRORS IN LONG AND SHORT THEMES

	TEN LONGEST			TEN SHORTEST			TEN AVERAGE LENGTH		
	Average Length	Errors per Theme	Errors per Number Words	Average Length	Errors per Theme	Errors per Number Words	Average Length	Errors per Theme	Errors per Number Words
New Trier..	244	12.4	1:19.6	118	10.6	1:11.0	181	9.2	1:19.6
University									
High.....	295	16.3	1:18.0	96	12.2	1: 7.1	184	7.3	1:25.2
Bloomington	311	28.3	1:10.9	105	10.8	1: 9.7	205	10.2	1:20.0
Vinton.....	246	13.7	1:17.9	95	5.7	1:16.7	173	11.1	1:15.6
Average..	274	17.6	1:16.6	103	9.8	1:11.1	185	9.4	1:20.1

themes approximated the average length for their group, 1 error to 25.2 words. Records for the four schools when computed together indicate a positive correlation between fluency and accuracy. However, it appears to be true also that too great fluency is accompanied by carelessness or by ignorance of detail. Those pupils produce compositions with greater freedom from mechanical errors who write neither very rapidly nor very slowly, whose speed of composition may be said to be appropriate for their group.

Table V shows all of the 322 themes arranged by schools in interval lengths of 50 words each. Again it is evident that the largest number of mechanical errors in proportion to fluency appears at the two extremes, although the difference is not quite so marked as in Table IV. Unusually short or unusually long themes are most imperfect, while the curve of error skews quite decidedly toward the shorter end of the table. Themes written with comparative fluency are superior in accuracy.

FLUENCY AND GENERAL EXCELLENCE

For the purpose of finding the relation between fluency and general excellence the 322 themes were graded according to the Harvard-Newton Scale for Narratives under five categories: themes ranking 100-93, A; 92-83, B; 82-76, C; 75-66, D; 65-56, E. Although a few deserved a grade lower than 56, no theme was graded lower than E, considered a failure. It is somewhat difficult to establish a test of general excellence which shall omit consideration of fluency and of mechanical accuracy. However, the attempt was

TABLE V
RATIO OF ERRORS TO NUMBER OF WORDS

	LENGTH					
	1-100	101-150	151-200	201-250	251-300	301-350
New Trier						
No. themes.....	4	19	21	23	3	
Ratio.....	1:11.8	1:16.1	1:14.0	1:20.6	1:25.8	
University High						
No. themes.....	5	32	42	31	9	5
Ratio.....	1:12.2	1:15.4	1:17.4	1:18.2	1:28.8	1:15.6
Bloomington						
No. themes.....	5	15	10	20	15	7
Ratio.....	1:10.3	1:13.1	1:15.8	1:16.2	1:15.9	1:11.5
Vinton						
No. themes.....	6	17	14	16	3	
Ratio.....	1:15.2	1:14.1	1:14.5	1:15.5	1:20.2	
Average.....	20 1:14.8	83 1:14.6	87 1:15.6	90 1:17.6	30 1:22.6	12 1:13.5

made to grade each paper on the basis of the list of qualifications of good narrative named below. In formulating these qualities of excellence effort was made to select characteristics of excellence suitable to be taught in the ninth grade and attainable at least by the most proficient of high-school Freshmen.

ELEMENTS OF GENERAL EXCELLENCE IN NARRATIVES, EXCLUSIVE OF FLUENCY
AND ACCURACY

1. One "story-idea"; simple tale of one's own experience.
2. Early attention to "who, when, where."
3. Introduction of leading character early.
4. A "plunge" into and out of the story.

5. An orderly "march" of selected details.
6. Arousing curiosity; creating suspense; satisfying it.
7. Appropriate, lifelike conversation or dialogue which carries on the story.
8. Suggestiveness in diction, especially in verbs.

Table VI groups the 322 themes first according to length intervals of 50 words, second according to grades of general excellence, A, B, C, D, E, third according to schools. It shows also summaries of each category for the four schools. Noticeable at once is the fact that the 20 themes under 100 words in length include none of Grade A, only 3 of Grade B, and 15 of Grades D and E; 8 of the 20 shortest themes are failures. On the contrary, 42 long

TABLE VI
FLUENCY AND GENERAL EXCELLENCE

GRADE	A					B					C					D					E				
LENGTH	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals
51-100	..	..	..	..	..	1	2	..	..	3	..	..	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	7	1	1	3	3	8
101-150	1	1	..	..	2	2	4	2	2	10	8	12	6	8	34	6	10	5	6	27	2	5	2	1	10
151-200	2	8	..	..	10	7	13	2	1	23	9	12	4	7	32	2	7	4	5	18	1	2	..	1	4
201-250	4	2	..	1	7	8	11	2	5	26	8	10	9	6	33	3	7	8	3	21	..	1	1	1	3
251-300	1	..	2	1	4	1	5	2	2	10	..	3	5	1	9	..	1	6	..	7	..	..	..	..	..
301-350	..	2	1	..	3	..	2	1	..	3	..	1	3	..	4	..	..	2	..	2	..	..	..	..	..
					26					75					114					82					25

themes of over 250 words include no failures and only 9 D themes. Twenty of the longest papers are of Grades A and B. One hundred fifty-seven themes of medium length, 150-250 words, well distributed according to the law of averages, show 66 of A and B rank, and, including C, 131 which may be considered very creditable work for high-school Freshmen. The 83 themes between 101 and 150 words in length are distributed well toward the lower end of the scale of excellence. On the basis of this data we seem to be justified in concluding that very short themes are poor in substance and in composition; that themes of medium length are likely to rank high in general excellence, very long themes ranking somewhat

below those of medium length. It is pertinent to note that almost invariably the themes over 250 words in length were rambling tales, incidents loosely bound together in time-relations. This violation of unity and lack of selection caused many of them to fall into ranks C and D.

ACCURACY AND GENERAL EXCELLENCE

Table VII is a rough portrayal of the relationship between general excellence and accuracy. To the left of the table is indicated the number of errors; above, the categories of excellence; within, the

TABLE VII
ACCURACY AND GENERAL EXCELLENCE

GRADE	A				B				C				D				E			
ERRORS	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals	New Trier	University High	Bloomington	Vinton	Totals
1.....	2				2					1	1			2			1			1
2.....	1	2			3	1	1			2	1		2	3	1		1			1
3.....					1	1				2	3	1		4	1		1			1
4.....	2				2	1	3	1		5	1	3		4	1		1			2
5.....					2	6				8	4	3		7	2	1	1			2
6.....					1	5	1	1		8	2	1	1	4	5		5	1		3
7.....	2	3	1		6	2	1		3	3	2	2	2	9	2	1	1			1
8.....	1	1			2	1	1		1	3	2	3	4	2	11	1	2	1	3	1
9.....	1				1	2				2	3	1	2	6	1	1	1	3	1	1
10.....	1	1	1	2	5	1	4	2		7	2	2		4	8	3	2	2	7	1
11.....	1	1			2	3	3			6	1	2	1	4	1	1	3	2	6	
12.....		1			1	1	1			2	1	2	2	2	7	1	2		5	2
13.....	1				1	1		1	1	3	1	1	1	4	1		1		2	1
14.....					1	2		2		5		2	1	3	3		2			1
15.....								2		2	2		1	2	5	2		1	3	3
16.....					2	2	1	2		7	1	2	1	4	1	2		3		
17.....		1			1	1		1		2	1	1	1	4		4		4		1
18.....					1			1		2	1		3	1	5		1			
19.....										1	2			3		1		1		
20.....					1	1				2		1		1	1		1		2	
Over 20					1	2	1			4	2	7	6	1	16	1	4	8	2	15
					26					75					114					82
																				25

showing of the four schools. Totals also are shown. Of the 25 themes ranking E, it will be remembered that 20 are below 100 words, giving relatively small opportunity for frequent errors. It

must be remembered too that some of the themes ranking D or higher would certainly fall into category E if inaccuracy were taken into account. For example, the theme which had the largest number of errors, 41, was 253 words long. This fact alone would throw such a theme into the column of failures, if it were not for the fact that the present endeavor is to omit accuracy as a test of excellence. Of the 26 A themes all but 5 have 10 errors or fewer; of the 75 B themes 51 have 13 or fewer errors each; C and D themes, mediocre in quality, include 31 which have total errors varying from 21 to 41 each, and a large percentage with errors ranging between 11 and 21.

The inference from this table is entirely in line with findings given above; namely, that pupils whose subject-matter and composition are good to excellent write with relative freedom from mechanical errors. Pupils whose work is mediocre in subject-matter and composition are also deficient in language mechanics. Indeed, the data here presented seem to bear out Ward's unsupported assertion that "the sort of mind that can learn accuracy is almost infallibly the sort of mind that can be orderly and effective, and vice versa."¹

CONCLUSIONS

The following statements are advanced, not as demonstrated conclusions, but as hypotheses for further investigation:

I. There appears to be a positive correlation between fluency and accuracy. Those pupils who write fluently are freest from mechanical errors. This statement needs to be qualified to a certain extent: some pupils who appear to write as they talk, in an endless string of run-on construction, whose chief means of coherence consists of ands and buts and sos, accompany extreme fluency with a marked increase of inaccuracy.

2. Approximate excellence in substance and composition seems to be attained most readily by those pupils who write with a reasonable, but not excessive, fluency.

3. General excellence in substance and rhetorical form apparently is accompanied by a reasonable command of the mechanics of writing.

¹ C. H. Ward, "The Scale Illusion," *English Journal*, VI (1917), 226.

If these hypotheses are later substantiated sufficiently to be regarded as facts they may have a distinct bearing upon our present methods of teaching composition. They seem to indicate that much of our effort in composition should be directed toward creating the conditions of effective expression as such, apart from mechanical accuracy. Laboratory time should be liberally spent in finding topics suitable for real, not artificial, communication; pupils should be taught to limit a subject: for example, to isolate one incident in a summer vacation, and to see this narrowed subject-matter as a unit before they begin to write. Moreover they are to be restrained from writing until they have thought their subjects through to the end. In the writing process itself they are to dash ahead, impatient of lagging pen and ignoring language details. Fluency is an indispensable condition of good expression. When their compositions are finished in rough form they are to be given all the time they need for recasting and revising and proofreading, to put their final draft in presentable form. After all is said, correct mechanics is a matter of care, rather than a matter of knowledge or of habit.

In short, even if we desire above all things to teach correctness, it may be entirely wise to place instructional effort, not primarily on mechanics, but on conditions and elements of composition which at first glance appear to be far removed from accuracy itself. Instead of teaching mechanics first, fluency second, and general excellence third, it is possible that we ought to reverse the order of emphasis. Create the conditions of excellent expression by giving children the materials and the audience; give them the assurance that their work is to have publicity and permanence; establish the conditions of fluent expression above all by removing, during the writing of the rough draft at least, the terrifying consciousness of language errors. Put proofreading and language drill where they belong, as final, not initial, processes; make them, as the Committee on Reorganization says, "matters of careful scrutiny." The reflex result of these conditions in our composition laboratories may be far superior work on the part of our pupils, both in language mechanics and in general excellence.